

TO: Members of the House Education Committee
FROM: Association of Michigan School Counselors (AMSC) and
Michigan School Counseling Association (MSCA)
DATE: February 1, 2006
SUBJECT: High School Graduation Requirements

Chairman Palmer and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments addressing the improvement of high school curriculum and the role of the school counselor in preparing students to succeed in the 21st Century. The Association of Michigan School Counselors (AMSC) and the Michigan School Counselors Association (MSCA) looks forward to working with the House Education Committee and the Michigan Department of Education in implementing the recommended curriculum. Together, the MSCA and the AMSC represent the interests of all K – 12 school counselors across the state, and our organizations are working together to assure that HB 5606 and subsequent implementation of the curriculum standards not only will be best for Michigan's students, but also assure that the role of the school counselor will actually be successful in that implementation.

One of the primary responsibilities of a school counselor is to deliver accommodations, interventions, and pathways to ensure student success. School counselors are in the best position to assess the systemic barriers to academic success for every student. They are the professionals that have access to crucial data including student placements, academic success and failure, and course-taking patterns. They are in communication with teachers, administrators and parents and are able to access human resources in the community. HB 5606 sets the stage for counselors to play a major role in moving students into and through the curriculum, and also clearly involves counselors in creating an alternative curriculum for certain students.

To that end, AMSC believes that serious consideration needs to be given to the growing ratios that are creating unmanageable caseloads. Quality program delivery and student success will be directly related to these ratios. Based on recommendations from the American Counseling Association and the American School Counseling Association, there should be one counselor for every 250 students. While many states have recognized that following recommended ratios leads to student success, Michigan has fallen behind. In fact, Michigan's high school counselor-to-student ratio is 354:1; *more than 100 students per counselor over the recommended level*. A comparison with the five other states used as a model for Michigan's recommended curriculum, all have ratios near or below the recommended 250:1 (see attached table). Empirical research indicates that high schools with fully implemented guidance programs had students that earned higher grades, were better prepared for the future, and had more career and college information available to them. Additionally, other studies show that underachieving students that receive quality guidance and counseling services had significant improvements in mathematics and language arts. Clearly, creating manageable caseloads is critical to a counselor's role, especially in light of the revised curriculum, the emphasis on moving all students towards postsecondary education and the new responsibility of creating alternative curricula.

AMSC also commends the HB 5606 in providing flexibility for Individualized Education Plans for special education students which supersede the proposed high school graduation requirements, as well as access to Career and Technical Education, or Humanities Course Sequences. It is important to note that the legislation provides for schools to work to grant access to all of the elements of the recommended graduation requirements, including cooperatives with surrounding school districts.

The concern again arises, however, regarding staffing and resources. Creating alternative education plans, or finding schools with additional resources and subsequently placing students in those schools, is no small order. The AMSC and the MSCA would recommend that the state conduct a staffing assessment to assure that the proposed legislation will be successful. If staffing does need to increase, the question of funding remains. We realize that the proposal allows flexibility in implementation, especially for districts with limited resources. Our organizations support a waiver system for those school districts. The point remains that some schools may be ill equipped to deliver this curriculum.

The House Education Committee sends a clear message with HB 5606 that Michigan will be a leader in preparing our future workforce. The best scenario with the passage of this legislation is that this priority is backed-up by a priority in the Appropriations Committee of assuring that the funds exist for implementation, in terms of funds for educational resources as well as the staff that will be required to make this work for students. We sincerely hope your colleagues recognize the same priority that you do, and we are prepared to work with the members of this committee in moving these priorities of content and funding through the legislature.

MSCA and AMSC would like to work collaboratively with the House Education Committee and the Michigan Department of Education to deliver curriculum that will adequately prepare students for postsecondary and workplace success. We would like to be an integral part of restoring Michigan as a leader in education.

2003-2004 High School Student-to-Counselor Ratios

STATE	Rhode Island	Arkansas	Indiana	Oregon	Massachusetts	<i>Michigan</i>
RATIO	229:1	227:1	228:1	258:1	168:1	<i>354:1</i>

U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005.